

### **Tribute to M.H.L.**

Magda Husáková-Lokvencová was an extraordinary woman. A Doctor of Laws, the first Slovak female theatre director, Gustáv Husák's wife, an intellectual, charismatic and beautiful woman, and an all-around singular personality in Slovak culture. A personality which, as is sadly usual with us, was gradually being forgotten. Fortunately, the last decade brought about intense efforts to recall the importance of this unusual woman. The result of these is, on the one hand, an extensive publication dedicated to the life and work of Slovakia's first female director (p. 38-40), on the other one a performance titled *M.H.L.*. It has to be noted right off the bat that *M.H.L.* is a true tribute to Magda Husáková-Lokvencová. All things considered.

For all her being the first female theatre director in Slovakia, if Magda Husáková-Lokvencová's life hadn't been as rich in dramatic events as it was, a documentary play of this scope and quality could hardly materialize. But the life that Husáková-Lokvencová lead, the times in which she had lived, the profession she chose, people who accompanied her life, but her personality in itself, as well – all of this are strong impulses for new works of art. Author, director and actress Sláva Daubnerová's monodrama, logically, focuses on three most important spheres of this character's life: the personal and professional life of Magda Husáková-Lokvencová, her career, and political changes which influenced and devastated her in both domains.

Daubnerová as an author already has experience with constructing a text fragmentarily compiled from several sources. Her *Cely* (“Cells”) were based on commentaries, interviews and private diary entries of the French visual artist Louise Bourgeois. With *M.H.L.*, Daubnerová goes decidedly further. In order to conjure up a complex picture of Magda Husáková-Lokvencová's life, she uses private correspondence, material from the family archive, as well as her directing notes, contemporary reviews and numerous documents from the archives of Nation's Memory Institute (Ústav pamäti národa), Theatre Institute (Divadelný ústav) in Bratislava, Security Services Archive (Bezpečnostní složky) or the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů), both in Prague. Daubnerová has thus come up with a text not only of high artistic, but also of documentary value. That she and dramaturg Pavel Graus have precisely managed to ascertain a balance in capturing her respective

spheres of life is a fact that should be especially appreciated. They introduce Husáková-Lokvencová to the audience as a director, as a loving woman, wife, woman clearly opinionated in politics, art and morals, as a human being unbroken by atrocities of two regimes. It is then a shame that in this otherwise exceptional mosaic, the theme of motherhood becomes almost completely absent.

Daubnerová takes it up only marginally, as a suggestion. Perhaps this is due to the Husák family's wishes. Where personal resorts, motivations and desires end and politics and its "higher powers" begin, Daubnerová utilizes video and sound recordings. These forms of stage expression, however, are not strictly limited to illustrate the political developments – Daubnerová applies them, for instance, also to demonstrate Lokvencová's artistic growth. Apart from weekly newsreels and recordings of police surveillance and investigation, sketches from director's books and personal correspondence appear on the screen as well.

Only rarely does it happen that the scriptwriter is a good director as well, to say nothing of acting. Yet Daubnerová is excellent in all roles in *M.H.L.*. It is even difficult to judge in which of these positions she is at her strongest – whether as a writer, director or an actress. The play's content alone is enlightening and inspiring. It is then delightful to state that the formal aspects are no weaker. All of the performance's elements, from the directing to the action, are in an absolute equilibrium. Of course, already while collecting her material, Daubnerová as the author must have had a clear vision of joining the fragments together so that they would suit Daubnerová as a director, as well as an actress. As an author, she and her collaborators have very well managed to connect documentary theatre with a theatre of catharsis, theatre of distance with a theatre assaulting the emotions, personal theatre and that of a universal message. What the audience sees is at once a full-blooded, emotional, didactic, classic and modern performance.

Daubnerová – the director – devotes close attention to a logical and functional structuring of space. Politics and things related happen everywhere and nowhere, that is, in the space of multimedia projection. Here she is aided with recordings of surveillance documents, screening of weekly newsreels, contemporary rave reviews, as well as reviews gradually more saturated with a rhetoric suited to the times. Images documenting Husáková-Lokvencová's time and her work are projected on a thin screen, hardly noticeable under normal lighting. Daubnerová often composes her *mise-en-scène* so that her action and projection complement one another, for instance in the scene of Husáková-Lokvencová talking about adapting Gorky's *Enemies*. While Daubnerová, as Lokvencová, speaks about the play's characters, shots of sketches from the director's book show up on the screen. Another space is

dedicated to the artistic work as well. As the actress recounts her character's acting and directing career, she stands before a camera positioned in the left part of the stage, her face projected on a closed door in the back of the stage. It is this door upon which the image of a descending and ascending elevator is projected, symbolically taking Husáková-Lokvencová up and down in favor and disfavor of theatre critics. The precise and intricate work of Lukáš Kodoň, who has made an excellent contribution with a large amount of video, thus deserves a special mention. Without his input, the piece would undoubtedly be weaker.

The aforementioned door also becomes the setting of a scene towards the end, in which an exhausted Husáková-Lokvencová gives up her life on its brink. As it opens, a narrow, claustrophobic space – a dead end, four walls that don't allow for escape – comes into the audience's view. Here, Daubnerová as Husáková-Lokvencová folds herself, climbs up and down tucked between two walls in bizarre, breakneck positions. The dominant space of the “stage” in Štúdio 12 became the setting for the rest of Lokvencová's life. Here, behind a small table (again with the use of a camera and projection on the back door), is where the family drama takes place, the table is set for a family dinner, letters to the heads of the Communist Party are written, in which Husáková-Lokvencová demands help for her incarcerated husband, a shattered plate – symbol of a shattered marriage – is glued back together. All the rest takes place in the vacant space. Miss Lokvencová, a high school student, plays tennis and fights for gender equality, Ms. Husáková works in a bank, Comrade Husáková-Lokvencová directs, Husáková – the enemy – falls in peoples' eyes, the beloved doctor Lokvencová confesses to her love for Ctibor Filčík, and it is also here that Magda Husáková-Lokvencová dies.

Just as the scriptwriting and directing duties, so does Sláva Daubnerová show her command of acting abilities. After seeing *M.H.L.*, it is certainly hard to imagine someone else than Daubnerová play the role of Magda Husáková-Lokvencová. The two women show physical similarities. Magda Husáková-Lokvencová was described as tall, slender, a classic beauty, charismatic and intriguing. Sláva Daubnerová could have relied on this typological kinship. However, there's more to this than an outside resemblance of her character. As Lokvencová, Daubnerová manages to convince internally as well. This plausibility, paradoxically, stems from a certain distance and coldness that the actress projects. Daubnerová clearly and concisely interprets Husáková-Lokvencová's thoughts and feelings, shunning half-tones and subtle emotional movements. Almost coldly, she speaks what Lokvencová once had. Still, Daubnerová does not limit herself only to a linguistic level of expression. She plays Husáková-Lokvencová with her whole body: a young girl, full of energy and vitality plays tennis, a married

woman desperately tries to escape from the newspapers' biting accusations, and a middle-aged woman, exhausted by all the dramatic turns of life, staggers on the stage in pain. A special mention also has to be given to the exceptional sensitivity for costume use. Daubnerová often changes it throughout her performance, but the change is always highly logical, aesthetic and functional. This is yet another point in which the collective's effort for the most accurate and aesthetic portrayal of Magda Husáková-Lokvencová's life possible comes through.

*M.H.L.* cannot be considered a clear-cut documentary work. While it is true that its inspiration was an extraordinary woman in the history of Slovak theatre, and that at its core are real documents mapping out her life, the creative collective managed to give them a new dimension. They have created an absorbing and unusually aesthetic performance.

**Slovo – spoločensko – politický týždenník (Slovo – social and political weekly)**

**volume 12/issue 19, p. 35**

**VLADIMÍR BLAHO**

**theatre journalist**

### ***M.H.L.*, a monodrama**

Interest in life and work of the theatre director Magda Husáková-Lokvencová (1916-1966) has recently increased within the cultural circles. Several articles have come out in periodicals, while the Theatre Institute released a memorial volume of theatrological studies (with particularly those of Ladislav Čavojský and Ján Jaborník standing out). One has to deal with a twofold risk when entering a discourse on this unusual artist. On the one hand, there is the danger of an ideological bias; on the other, the desire to interpret certain moments of her turbulent life with a flair of sensationalism or fashionable feminism. Sláva Daubnerová's documentary monodrama, shown in Bratislava's Štúdio 12 under the title *M.H.L.*, successfully avoids both of these risks.

### **Woman in a time of anomalies**

This, in a true sense of the word, is auteur theatre. Not only is Daubnerová an actress, director, she is first and foremost the author of a text which she put together in an admirable way, suggesting her being deeply touched by the trials and tribulations of our first female theatre director.

She based the text on her research in fifteen archives of Slovak and Czech Republic (together with the

dramaturg, Pavel Graus), composing it mostly from Husáková's letters addressed to her friend Oľga Lichardová, relatives, as well as officials. She also utilizes contemporary critiques of Husáková's work, records of the secret police from the Second World War and the 1950s, as well as other documents. Central to the performance is Ms. Magda primarily as a woman, that is a woman with both private and professional lives – the former being strongly influenced by the latter. What unfolds before us is a drama of a woman whose private and professional life is pervaded by a time full of anomalies and changes in society, a time of both hope and despair, sunny and rainy days, a time in which it was hard to live, but it was even harder to remain morally intact. So we watch Ms. Magda as an artist full of ambition and creative enthusiasm, but also doubts of herself, as a woman who cannot imagine her life without theatre and who had to come to terms with being looked at (briefly in a positive light, later negatively, almost fatally so) first and foremost as a wife of a politician, Gustáv Husák. But we also “see” her as a loving mother of two sons, as a woman entering a relationship with actor Ctibor Filčík, a woman with her existential pains, health issues and secret desires. Daubnerová is not an actress with professional training (she has a degree in Cultural Studies) and her expression is relatively modest, yet it corresponds to the character, who covered up her rich inner world with a distant behavior. Right off the bat, the stage artists exhaustively characterize Husáková's multifaceted personality on a back screen by dozens of attributes, often contradictory, but taken together they all make up the totality of her character. The monodrama's direction can also be described as satisfactory, in that the pantomimic display of a health collapse before death and an introductory singing number is followed by the actress' lively speech, interrupted or complemented by playback from a speaker on numerous occasions. A sense of complexity is also achieved with projection on a translucent screen in the stage center (scenes of family parties, forums or theatre performances), which not only serve as illustrations, but often create a counterpoint to the text or an action. Use of props and sound design are sparse, but effective. What I also find notable is that we are shown shots of Mayakovsky's *The Bathhouse* as staged at Nová scéna, as it is precisely this performance which scholars and experts tend to avoid in their inquiries. It seems somehow inappropriate now to remember a poet, about whom Vítězslav Nezval wrote that “what he loved most was verse and a cylinder revolver”.

### **Glory is the grave of love**

Although the stage look at Magda Husáková by far surpasses the teatrological one, in the words of Peter Karvaš, this performance requires a prepared audience and will speak mostly to an older generation. A generation which finds it normal, rather than ridiculous, to hear an address of “comrade”, which remembers Husáková's work at Nová scéna or in television. It is also directed at those intimate

with theatre, from either side of the stage. But maybe to others as well, those who can identify with the principles of a woman referred to as M.H.L.. That is, that glory is the grave of love and that without love, our brief sojourn on Earth would turn into a valley of tears.

**DN Divadelní noviny**

**divadelni-noviny.cz**

*Published on: June 2, 2010*

*Nová dráma/ New Drama festival 2010*

*10.-15.5.2010, Bratislava, sixth year*

**MIRIAM KIČIŇOVÁ**

**dramaturg, theatre critic**

### **New Drama, paradoxically historical**

[...] *M.H.L.* is a modern performance not only due to its highly specific theme, with which the author pays a tribute to one of Slovakia's big theatre personalities, but also due to its conceptual form. Sláva Daubnerová introduces us to Husáková-Lokvencová in all sorts of social roles – as a mother, wife of a prisoner, of a president, a director, an actress, a woman. Her straightforward delivery, use of visuals, projection, the space of Štúdio 12 – all this interacts in a minimalist, understated performance, thought out precisely and in detail. Daubnerová composed the text colorfully, out of authentic historical documents, photographic material or private correspondence. Events are ordered chronologically: we are informed of her childhood, work, her desire to act, first experience in film, theatre, with directing. Daubnerová contents herself with a small table and a camera closing in on the action – for instance, breaking a plate, then gluing it back together as a metaphor for the relationship with her husband. She utilizes the empty space in a different manner, such as for transitions from one side to the next in different tempos to express the fear of being watched, constantly being on the run. The performance is rather biographic and an understanding of certain political, as well as artistic references may be complicated for someone unfamiliar with the historical background. But it is endowed with the spirit of a modern theatre, a theatre of shortcuts and visual conception. [...]

**Dekodér**

**kød – konkrétne o divadle supplement**

**Nr. 7, September 2010**

*Touches & Connections paradoxically characterized by isolation*

[...] With the midnight performance of the P.A.T. theatre, in collaboration with Štúdio 12, titled *M.H.L.* again, another day came to a conclusion on an artistically inspiring note (as with all midnight performances, it took place in the circus tent). Young author, director and performer in one person, Sláva Daubnerová, offered something intense – in both form and content. This work about Magda Husáková-Lokvencová, first professional female director and the wife of a former elite politician, took the guise of a documentary monodrama saturated with precise academic research, as well as creative ideas. The performance presented a collage of theatre, film, music and science. It constantly demanded the attention of all senses. Through its sober solemnity, it even stimulated the implicitly absent emotions. With her performance, Sláva offered an unconventional experience, the form of which instigated a discussion among critics about the absence of passion – so desired in theatre – in such formally polished work. Then again, most of those present did not especially demand emotions from this form. What it alluded to was Brecht's epic theatre, where emotions and passions aren't lived out, but rather shown, thus allowing for their understanding and a reflection upon their emergence even after the performance. Sláva managed to do this in all its facets, aptly linking art to politics, an individual with social conditions, work and the fragile life itself. [...]

**Festival bulletin**

**19<sup>th</sup> International theatre festival Divadelná Nitra**

**MAJA HRIEŠIK**

An intimate tragedy of a quiet dying-out of love and deadness of the life in loneliness. A balanced play of words and movements exceeding the Slovak staging traditions. In her monodrama the interesting author and performer Sláva Daubnerová reconstructs the complicated life of the first Slovak female theatre director Magda Husáková-Lokvencová (M.H.L.). Based on historical documents about the life of the wife of Gustáv Husák, a leftist intellectual, political prisoner and later the president of Czechoslovakia during the normalization period, she uncovers a stirring story of the forming and destruction of the artistic ambitions in a collision with the rolling mechanism of totalitarian politics. She was a woman-director in the environment which tolerated it but considered it a bizarre exception.

She was a promising and progressively thinking artist, but married to a man who was, for some period, a high political official, then a political prisoner and after her death even the president of the normalization Czechoslovakia – Gustáv Husák. She was a progressively thinking intellectual, and later a quieted theatre artist, during the period when politics started to press the neck of art and made their relationship a “comrade-like”, mutually profitable co-existence. The first lady of Slovak theatre directing – Magda Husáková-Lokvencová. Based on the impulses from the publication by Nadežda Lindovská: Magda Husáková-Lokvencová First Lady of Slovak Theatre Directing and on the archive materials about the complicated and tragic life of this until recently almost forgotten theatre artist, the notable Slovak artist and performer Sláva Daubnerová sews for herself a made to measure new story of this documentary drama. As in her previous works, she starts with facts, or recorded thoughts of the person depicted, which she models and shapes by her original acting sensibility and unique director’s intellect into a quite contemporary and acute confession. By the production of M.H.L. she may indirectly make present the development of the political events in the post-war Czechoslovakia, as well as the life of the then cultural circles or Bratislava’s artistic elite, but she tries to find in them timelessness, universality without it being pamphleted or slipping into descriptiveness or moralizing. By the minimum of means, a balanced coordination of words, movement, sound and visual artistic ambitions she lets us plunge into the intimate tragedy of unsatisfied desire for love and the crash of artistic ambitions influenced by unfavourable circumstances. On the other side, she mediates us the feeling of the intimate victory of the spirit and its unbeatable endeavor to keep the richness of life and freedom, despite the pressure of the fate or deserted life in loneliness. Daubnerová does not lose for a moment the control over temperance of the chosen acting means. She makes an impression as if she perceived Husáková-Lokvencová from some distance. She analyzes her, listens to her and at the same time feels with her. She tries to get closer to her, but not to merge. She stays natural, and by this as if from every movement of her muscles, slightly raised eyebrow, shape of the nose, vigorous step emerged Husáková-Lokvencová herself. Or does she only want that by the help of Husáková-Lokvencová Daubnerová would emerge like a butterfly? Be as it is, this beautiful butterfly flies around and playfully decides when and how many of us will she let into her valuable inner world and intimacy. Without any redundant stage stylization, only by the adequacy of the chosen stage means and the frankness of the testimony.

**kød – konkrétne o divadle**

**Vol. 4, Nr. 9 (November 2010), p.18**

**19<sup>th</sup> International theatre festival Divadelná Nitra**

September 24-27, 2010 in Nitra

ZUZANA FERUSOVÁ

*Theatre breaking down borders of the (ab)normal?*

[...] The selection of domestic productions, aside from being limited by the dramaturgic focus of each respective year (of the festival), is also a matter of prestige. For a local troupe, it stands not only for affirmation in a domestic context, but also for its “competitive worth”, as well as a seal of quality comparable to that of the festival's international guests. This year, people who would otherwise be considered unrelated have come together on Divadelná Nitra, the reason being a new interest of the Slovak theatre producers to look back on our past. Linked with their aim to brush off the dust off our (historical) personalities' remarkable lives is a rather intimate theme, that is a theme of an artist and his or her work, not avoiding the matter of their self-realization in context of an unfavorable time.

In Rast'o Ballek's *Hollyroth*, Robert Roth becomes Hollý time and again only to become Robert Roth once more, or else an anonymous actor feeling the gravity of his craft. Magda Husáková-Lokvencová, in a directorial and acting interpretation by Sláva Daubnerová also doesn't exploit the audience's interest to direct its attention to her fateful limitations, set out by the realities of the time she lived in. On the contrary, thanks to Daubnerová's sensitive approach, what we get to see is a story of a woman and an artist – not quite easily reconstructed, sometimes rhapsodic, but in its artistic power perfectly thorough – who with all her strength tries to accomplish her fundamental desire: to fulfill her life through art. At the same time, Daubnerová allows for a glimpse of M.H.L.'s private life, in which she – again, in an extraordinarily sensitive manner – utilizes snapshots of her life to project the person in all of her complexity, considering her roles as a wife, lover or a mother. Both performances (*Hollyroth* and *M.H.L.*) introduce personages whose existence is completely determined by their singularity. But in the context of their time, they are also outsiders, dispossessed individuals; be it because of their lifestyle choices, an unfortunate mesh of outside factors, but also as the price for their effort to subjugate a number of aspects in their lives to a single one – to create and live art. [...]

**DN Divadelní noviny**

**divadelni-noviny.cz**

**Published on: September 27, 2010**

**19<sup>th</sup> International theatre festival Divadelná Nitra**

**September 24-27, 2010 in Nitra**

*Christov's Nitra (No. 3)*[...] *Slovak talents*

Two female theatre producers were on the afternoon schedule. (One of them was) the young director, author, and head of the P.A.T. theatre from Prievidza, Sláva Daubnerová (*Newcomer of the year* of this year's Dosky awards, announced on Friday). For her *M.H.L.*, she was inspired by the life and work of an enthralling personality of Slovak theatre, actress and director Magda Husáková-Lokvencová – some might correctly associate her as the wife of a Czechoslovak left-wing politician (also a political prisoner, and later the president of Czechoslovakia), Dr. Gustáv Husák. Daubnerová likes to work alone, she comes up with a concept for herself and takes on the directorial and acting duties as well (and so she might be called something of a “performer *an sich*”) – worthy of reminding here is her stage concept, based on Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine*. As a director, she looks for forms being able to express what she herself seeks to express through theatre. With her recent stage adaptation of a Jon Fosse novel – purely by intuition and without knowledge of Fosse's drama texts – she came up with a form strongly reminiscent of Fosse's dramas, yet which still preserved something of her inspiration by lecture of existentialists and their followers, while at the same time being an expression of the author herself. *M.H.L.* is an attempt to piece together a story of Magda Husáková-Lokvencová out of documentary material (correspondence, interviews, written records, official documents, photographs, as well as film and television footage), and thus offer the audience not only biographical facts, but also to undertake a journey to the depths of a creative soul of one of the first Slovak (and by extension, Czechoslovak) female directors and to show – through woman's eyes – the life and thinking of another one. And it has to be pointed out that it is a life which is thoroughly thrilling, fascinating in its complexity and fervor for theatre, family, and friends. Sláva Daubnerová's performance takes place behind a transparent curtain, she imaginatively works with various projections and audio recordings. Sure enough, there is much to it that could yet be fine-tuned, but despite this, it is in many respects a demonstration of what is suited to theatre today. Some might call it irregular dramaturgy, some post-dramatic theatre, yet another may call it documentary theatre (or with a more hip term, *docu-theatre*). In any case, it is a work requiring a certain measure of activity of its audience, but for that offers significant (additional) value – it introduces a topic which has been rather invisible until now, although it is a very inspiring chapter of Czecho-Slovak (not only) theatre history. And to those who would like

to learn more about the charming, intelligent, alluring and capable dame known as M.H.L., Nadežda Lindovská's (et al.) *Magda Husáková-Lokvencová: Prvá dáma slovenskej divadelnej réžie* („Magda Husáková-Lokvencová: First lady of Slovak theatre directing“), released by the Slovak Theatre Institute and Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava two years ago, is a hearty recommendation. [...]

**DN Divadelní noviny**

**divadelni-noviny.cz**

**Published on: October 16, 2010**

**19<sup>th</sup> International theatre festival Divadelná Nitra**

**September 24-27, 2010 in Nitra**

**MARTIN PORUBJAK**

**dramaturg**

### **Ins and Outs of Divadelná Nitra 2010**

[...] The collaboration of P.A.T. and Štúdio 12, the documentary monodrama *M.H.L.* (with a script, stage concept and directed by Sláva Daubnerová) was awarded the Newcomer of the year for this season. The monodrama is a story of the bitter life and extraordinary work of the first professional female theatre director, Magda Husáková-Lokvencová; a formally modest and unspectacular, yet very impressing work of an author, who at the same time reservedly and emphatically interprets the tragicomic fate of an unparalleled woman and artist. I have attended one of the shows in Bratislava together with the great Finnish dramaturg and translator Jukka Pekka, who managed to pick up the performance's message precisely in spite of the language barrier. [...]

**Lidové noviny**

**Vol. 24, Nr. 221 , September 20, 2011 [Tuesday], p.8**

**19<sup>th</sup> International theatre festival Divadlo 2011 Plzeň**

**September 14-22, 2011**

**VLADIMÍR MIKULKA**

### **Musical solo for a spinning coin**

One of the remarkable points in dramaturgy of this year's Divadlo ("Theatre") festival was a cluster of performances turning to the lives of historical personalities. The monodramas *Hollyroth* (Slovak National Theatre), *Historický monolog* ("Historical Monologue", The National Theatre) and *M.H.L.* (Bratislava-based P.A.T.), dealing with the director Magda Husáková-Lokvencová thus ended up in one sequence.

Compared to the theatrically eruptive, affectively ironic *Hollyroth*, or on the contrary *Historický monolog*, which is more grounded in philosophy, *M.H.L.* looks like an ordinary one man show. Sláva Daubnerová, author, director and actress in one person, comes up with a chronological account of the life of Magda Husáková-Lokvencová (1916-1966), an important Slovak director and the first wife of the leader of Slovak communists, political prisoner and a symbol of normalization. The double helix of the previous sentence is invisibly drawn out through the whole performance: while Daubnerová ostentatiously concentrates herself purely on Lokvencová's life and leaves politics and its context aside, it is precisely her marriage to Gustáv Husák which sets the story in motion, giving it a dash of juiciness and drama. This is because the core of *M.H.L.* is made up of the period in which the postwar Slovak prime minister was imprisoned by his comrades, depriving his wife and children of economic resources. First, Daubnerová fleetingly sketches the prewar life of Magda Lokvencová and her path to theatre, after which she carefully observes her fall, caused by Husák's arrest, followed by her persistent attempts to return to theatre. On stage, the director abandons herself completely to what, in theatre jargon, is often referred to by the abhorrent term "accentuation": documentary, shot and online projections, songs, reading of correspondence, chiaroscuro scenes and so on. A symbolic shot of a paternoster serves as a recurrent theme – here, Lokvencová either rises or descends according to the momentary measure of her success; later on, she also does "exercises" – that is, when she doubts herself. The result is a seemingly, easily forgettable performance about one talented and appealingly unbreakable woman. *M.H.L.* will most probably not enrapture nor enrage: Daubnerová supplies all basic information on her titular figure, makes some moderate theatrical magic and safely avoids all controversial topics. [...]

**Rozrazil online**  
**rozrazilonline.cz**

**Published on: September 18, 2011**

**19<sup>th</sup> International theatre festival Divadlo 2011 Plzeň**

**September 14-22, 2011**

***M.H.L.***

**“Theatre was all I wished for in my life.”**

*M.H.L.* – a rather mysterious title of this Slovak performance. Yet it simply consists of of Magda Husáková-Lokvencová's initials, whose life and work served as the creative team's inspiration. It is as if actress and director Sláva Daubnerová prophetically sends the graciousness for her character, which she will need so much of in the future, when she sings Doris Day's *Que sera sera* – “What will be, will be” – at the beginning of this monodrama. Magda is an adult woman, polemic about the narrow-minded society and time in which she lives. She longs for gender equality and is puzzled about the constrained plans of graduating schoolgirls for the future. They only intend to get married and have a family – and these are not women in whom Magda could see the fulfillment of her emancipatory ideas.

As a law graduate, she also finds her vocation elsewhere – most of all, in a different kind of work. But her plans are no less ambitious, she assuredly pursues her dreams and chooses an artistic path. She becomes a film actress, gradually getting to work in theatre as a professional director, and it is this profession which becomes her only “dear and beloved work”. She gets to know the, in her own words “smartest” man Gustáv Husák, whom she marries and with whom she has two children. It might seem that her life is practically perfect. But suddenly, her professional and private lives become too closely entangled. Political circumstances force her to choose between career and family – she receives an offer to either divorce Husák, declare a statement and stay in theatre, or not to divorce and lose her position. She chooses family. She is laid off, her husband is imprisoned and she remains alone with two children, in a difficult situation and without economic resources. A series of exclamation marks hovering above her head and blows she receives on the path of her life, as it were, would not let her exhale peacefully until the end – and “a bound life knows no beauty, after all”. Video art, graphic and sound design are vital elements in this performance, the creative team utilizes all sorts of archive material, either played back from speakers or projected on a screen behind which the actress is moving around, while commenting on the images, or through her actions complements or explains them. The collective behind *M.H.L.* thus chooses the documentary form as a basis. They work with many photographs, excerpts from films and theatre productions, readings of newspaper articles, official documents and correspondence. Authentic shots of Magda as an actress in the film *Vlčie diery* (“Wolves' Lairs”) are projected on the screen, illustrating her acting career. Magda's directorial thoughts are disclosed through shots of a director's book for her staging of Gorky's *Enemies*. These are

supplemented with Magda's commentary on mise-en-scène and explanation of how she perceives the characters' relations. The archive material is also accompanied by new shots. An elevator becomes the symbol of Magda's career – she rises when her direction receives positive reviews, she descends when they are negative. When Magda hesitates about accepting a new job in theatre, she stands before an empty elevator, when she feels her work stagnate, the elevator stays in place. In much the same way, a plate set on a table becomes the symbol of family – first, she arranges it with care, then breaks it in the aftermath of her unfavorable predicament, only to make an unsuccessful attempt to glue it together in the end. With *M.H.L.*, the creative team helmed by Sláva Daubnerová managed to resurrect the message of the first lady of Slovak directing without pathos, heartbreaking moments and whitewashing, and to transport it across the stage. They passed the knowledge of theatre experts on to an ordinary audience, to which Magda Lokvencová would probably remain hidden beyond the shadow of the name Husák.

**DN Divadelní noviny**

**divadelni-noviny.cz**

**Published on: 18. Zář, 2011**

**19<sup>th</sup> International theatre festival Divadlo 2011 Plzeň**

**September 14-22, 2011**

**VLADIMÍR HULEC**

#### **Plzeň's tittle tattle (No.4)**

Plzeň is still sunny, although gray skies begin to move over it, with the occasional teardrop falling down from time to time. Tears of the past and storms of the present were also the motto of the Saturday program.

#### **He was the smartest one...**

First to arrive in Alfa (theatre) was a fragile composition of diary entries, correspondence and period documents of and about Gustáv Husák's first wife, Magda Husáková-Lokvencová (1916-1966). These were processed, rehearsed as a production of P.A.T. – a professional Slovak platform for contemporary theatre – as a “documentary monodrama” titled *M.H.L.*, and also performed by the 31-year old Slovak actress and director Sláva Daubnerová. The audience follows her life from her fascination with

communism, acquaintance with Husák (they married on September 1, 1938), the war turmoil, Slovak National Uprising, and Magda's arrival in Moscow, where their son Vladimír was born on October 23, 1944. Descriptively and factually, her life and the performance go on. Through her stints in the postwar years and Husák's arrest and lifetime conviction until their (somewhat unclear) divorce, her relationship with the actor Ctibor Filčík and the final “passing by” both men in Bratislava in the middle of 1960s. The performance is unproblematic, if a bit overly aestheticized, nostalgic, full of slowly moving scenes and events. Here and there, we see a period document, Daubnerová-Husáková rides up and down on a paternoster according to the sine wave of her destiny, perpetually copying the fateful times of her character's life. It is as if we were rummaging through a briefcase of her diaries and letters. We don't learn anything more, authorial position and interpretation are nowhere to be found. It is probably exactly this – as well as the unrefined directorial and staging techniques at use – which made a substantial part of the present intellectual theatre critics (also dramaturgs and other theatre professionals) to denounce the performance as – in its own way – kitsch. Still, I have to be more tolerant myself. This kind of documentary theatre, dealing with the past in a nonconflicting manner, has its purpose too. It aims for understanding, compassion and tolerance. These are also necessary when looking at our past, from which our present stems. Even if *M.H.L.* is no juggernaut. “He was the smartest one, that's why I married him,” says the titular character about her husband. [...]

**kød- konkrétne o divadle**

**Vol. 5, Nr. 9 (November 2011), p.19**

**19<sup>th</sup> International theatre festival Divadlo 2011 Plzeň**

**September 14-22, 2011**

**ZUZANA FERUSOVÁ**

**theatre critic**

### **(Good) news from Divadlo**

The nineteenth year of international festival Divadlo (“Theatre”) in Plzeň opened another theatre and festival season, bringing with it an exhibition of the Czech theatre scene, enriched with rare delicacies to the vicinity of Prague and not terribly far from Bratislava. Inviting Slovak guests was another pleasant aspect, thanks to which two performances, representing the best of Slovak theatre in recent years, could present themselves before a Czech and international audience. [...] The guest embodying novel and different approaches in an oeuvre of national theatres was *Hollyroth*. Although Hollý's language was nigh incomprehensible for the Czech audience, assisted by subtitles, or perhaps in complete abandonment to its melodic and onomatopoeic qualities, it was captivated mainly by Robert

Roth's performance.

Although the other Slovak guest, tandem of Sláva Daubnerová and Pavel Graus with the P.A.T. theatre, did not represent the national scene, their monodrama with “performative qualities” (as with *Hollyroth*, the Czech critics were positive chiefly about the aspect of performativity) enchanted the audience as well. It praised not only Sláva Daubnerová's performance as Magda Husáková-Lokvencová, but every mention of the name of our common Czechoslovak history was accompanied by a plethora of reactions in the room, ranging from an affirming laughter to ironic smirks and heavy sighs. The theatre circles would then go on to debate why this artist is still unknown in the Czech Republic, whether she is an acting or directing graduate or where her P.A.T. theatre is based. That might well change soon – Sláva Daubnerová is preparing a new piece for the HaDivadlo in Brno for the actual season. [...]

**Lidové noviny**

**Vol. 24, Nr. 234 (October 6, 2011), p. 9**

**XVI. International exhibition One man show**

**September 29 – October 2, 2011**

**ROMAN SIKORA**

**theatre critic**

### **Plays for egocentric loners**

[...] Another pleasant surprise for the festival was the Slovak *M.H.L.*, multi-media theatre bordering on conceptual art developed as a collaboration between P.A.T. and Štúdio 12 in Bratislava. Central to it was the personage of Magda Husáková-Lokvencová, actress, theatre and film director, as well as the first wife of the communist big-shot Gustáv Husák. Through two projection screens, a number of outstanding visual ideas, minimalist physical action, but mostly through speeches, performer and director Sláva Daubnerová tries to bring back to light the forgotten life of a woman standing by Husák's side during the wartime, but also during his imprisonment, only to divorce him after his parole. But this performance, too, ends up having problems with the narrative's consistence, casually omitting some basic facts the audience eagerly awaits, instead opting to overwhelm it with monotonous quotations from a slew of letters and such. [...]

**Literární noviny**

**roč. 22, č. 40 (October 6, 2011), p. 12-13.**

**XVI. International exhibition One man show**

**September 29 – October 2, 2011**

**TEREZA SIEGLOVÁ**

**theatre critic**

***Focus on the actors***

The Divadlo jednoho herce (“One man show”) festival of Cheb's Západočeské divadlo stands apart among the other local festivals because of its genre specialization, as well as its long tradition. This was already the sixteenth year of this biennale, which always delivers a digest of the best Czech monodramatic performances, confronted with a number of international ones – this time from Slovakia, Poland and Germany.

[...] Slovakia was represented by the documentary monodrama *M.H.L.* about the life and work of Magda Husáková-Lokvencová, the first professional female director and first wife of the Czechoslovak president, Gustáv Husák. Sláva Daubnerová, the author of the stage concept, director and performer, studied and compiled a significant amount of valuable material and documents, and based on these then created a very visually appealing work built on modern technology – mainly projections, combined with the performer. Some of the staging ideas are worth pointing out – capturing a very slow and careful setting of a plate and utensils on the table when Magda speaks about her marriage, breaking that plate in the moment of Gustáv Husák's arrest, and Magda's vain attempt to glue the plate's pieces together when she writes letters to her husband in jail. Further, the excerpts from first positive, then negative critiques accompanied by video of Husáková riding an elevator first up, then down. Although the performance omitted the crucial moment of Magda and Gustáv's divorce, it still stands for an unusually honest, rich in substance and formally experimental piece of theatre. [...]

**DN Divadelní noviny**

**divadelni-noviny.cz**

**Published on: October 2, 2011**

**XVI. International exhibition One man show**

**September 29 – October 2, 2011**

**DOMINIK MELICHAR & KLÁRA ZINDULKOVÁ**

***Solo for...Cheb (No.3)***

[...] **A hint of theatrical elegance**

Unique among this year's selection was the “documentary monodrama inspired by the life and work of Slovakia's first professional director Magda Husáková-Lokvencová“ titled after her initials, *M.H.L.*. The director and author of this singular stage concept, Sláva Daubnerová, attempted to bring the difficult subject matter of the arduous life of the normalization president's first wife to theatre. The seemingly untheatrical archive material, letters and other documents mapping out the life of an important personality in Slovak culture she used as her sources, became Daubnerová's theatrical advantage in the end. She didn't hesitate to combine traditional drama with video, documentary and fiction. Consequently and precisely, she utilized her functional, well thought-out stage: it is spatially divided in two through a semi-transparent curtain, which on the one hand serves as a projection screen with which the performer may intervene at any given time, on the other as a demarcation line of the protagonist's diverse feelings at different stages of life. Two projection screens, a camera integrated to a lamp, transmitting to the foreground a blow-up of a table which set the stage for some of the key moments. Nine office files as the only other prop. The protagonist's cool elegance. Her use of standard Slovak... The stage concept allowed that just through the use of light, the stage space would transform completely. The very front is where almost documentary scenes take place, captured by the camera and transmitted live to the back screen, while the space behind the translucent screen is where the audience sees the world of emotions, dreams and inner commentaries. I didn't know whether I should attribute the ingenuity and functionality of the visual concept to the scenographer or director. Daubnerová sorted it out for me – she was responsible for the stage design, direction and performance herself. With this, she has fulfilled the legacy of the extraordinarily determined, unyielding and talented protagonist, and rightfully deserves to be admired. Attempts for documentary theatre have a tradition here (in Czech Republic) and are recently going through a certain renaissance (notably, for instance, the Prague-based Komedie and their *Černé panny* [“Black Virgins”]). Sláva Daubnerová has proved that documentary theatre is developing promisingly in Slovakia as well. [...]

**NADEŽDA LINDOVSKÁ**

**theatrolgist**

**„Ženy z minulosti“**

**in: Podmaková, Dagmar a kol.: *Podoby a premeny hrdinu v súčasnom divadle***

*Women of the past (Nadežda Lindovská –)*

[...] In February 2010, Štúdio (12) in Bratislava's Theatre Institute, in collaboration with the P.A.T. theatre from Prievidza, premiered Sláva Daubnerová's new original project titled *M.H.L.*, through which director Magda Husáková-Lokvencová figuratively returned to the stage – that stands for all the world – after forty years. (...) In *M.H.L.*, Sláva Daubnerová composes a portrait of the first female director in Slovakia, Magda Husáková-Lokvencová, as well as her own, in that she perceives Lokvencová's life path as a theatre artist analogous to her own efforts. For instance, Sláva Daubnerová as well as Magda Husáková-Lokvencová embarked on the path to realize their own dreams in theatre only after obtaining their “non-theatrical” graduate diplomas. Both have stated their acting, directorial and authorial ambitions. Still more, Daubnerová *de facto* takes up a profession considered exclusively male before Magda Lokvencová's emergence. Akin to our first female theatre director, she too takes on a female view and subject matter in her work. The motif of a certain mutual reflection, stepping in and out of character is even contained, on a non-verbal level, in the performance itself. Daubnerová meticulously creates a closed space of a stage confession, which she enters only after a peculiar prologue, and which she sometimes leaves. It cannot be said that she would enter the past from the present, she rather builds up a certain layer of timelessness, on which she is more Sláva Daubnerová than Magda Husáková-Lokvencová.

Actress and director Sláva Daubnerová has conceived her play from the outset as a monodrama, and therefore – as all monodramatic artists – she had to be resourceful in creating fictitious partners and dialogues for the protagonist. Her speeches go out to a variety of absent addressees: male and female friends, acquaintances, politicians or actors. Monologues of Slovakia's first female director are intruded upon by voices of other people, played back from sound recording and providing important biographical information. Thus Sláva Daubnerová has come to embody something of an alter ego for Magda Husáková-Lokvencová, particularly for the younger audience.

Hand in hand with a tendency to shift from confessions of the stage character to a personal confession of the performer emerges another one – an inclination towards monologue, even monodrama. After all, it is precisely the monodrama that radically utilizes the dramatic potential of the act of confession. [...] The productions which enhanced the repertoire of Slovak theatres with the “phenomenon of women of

the past” were successful with audiences and critics alike. [...] At the end of the 2009/2010 season, *M.H.L.* received two nominations and Sláva Daubnerová received an award for the Newcomer of the season. [...]